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SUGGESTIONS VERSUS JOB RESPONSIBILITIES

An award may be granted to an employee for an adopted suggestion which concerns matters either within or outside of his job responsibilities. However, if within his job responsibilities, it must be so superior or meritorious as to warrant special recognition.

The following should be considered in determining whether the suggestion, if within job responsibilities, is so superior as to warrant an award or whether the suggestion is outside the employee's job responsibility.

1. The employee's job description, assigned duties, and the normal assigned performance requirements of his position.

   Consider these questions:

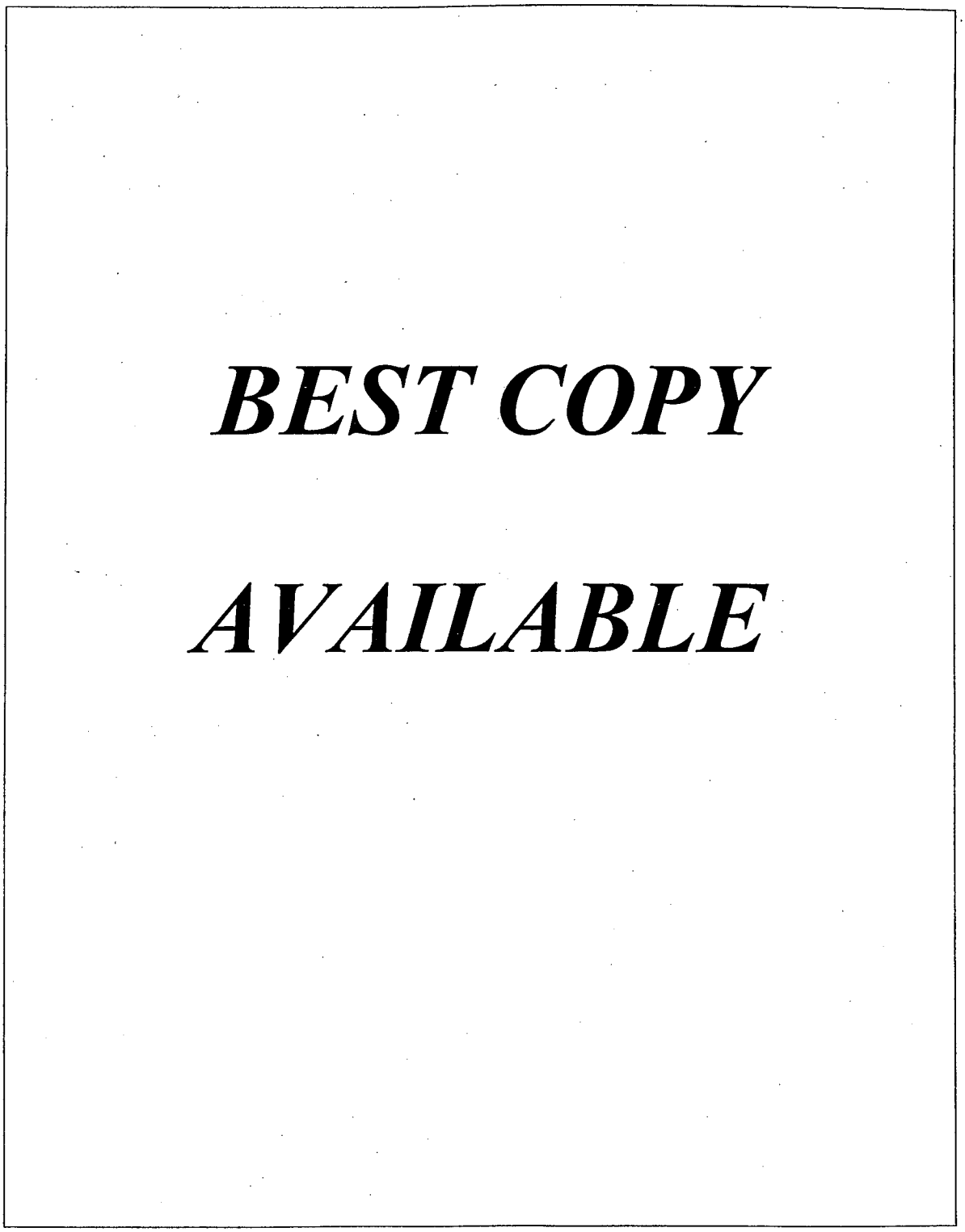
   a. Is the employee expected or required to make suggestions of the type under consideration? If so, is there anything that is special or unique about this particular one?

   b. Is the nature of the suggestion such that the employee's performance would be judged less than satisfactory if he had not made this suggestion?

   c. Is the suggestion one pertaining to the immediate work area which the employee can place into operation without consulting higher authority and which affects only his work?

2. The extent of application of the suggestion.

   For example, a suggestion affecting his own unit is made by a supervisor but is not considered eligible for an award because it is the type of idea expected of him in supervising that unit. However, after further study it is found that this same suggestion may be applied to many other units. Awards may be granted under these circumstances for the benefits derived in the other units.



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DON'T WAIT FOR IDEAS . . . GO AFTER THEM

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The notion once prevailed that the ability to have ideas was like the ability to wiggle your ears. Either you were born with it or you weren't. That was that.

Now there is plenty of evidence to contradict such notions. We realize that everyone has the ability to originate ideas and solve problems. There is equal evidence that people don't use this ability to the fullest.

But we are learning methods that will enable us to make the most of our idea-creating ability. We can learn to go after ideas, rather than wait for them. This means we can solve problems more effectively.

How do we go about it? First, by understanding the process by which the mind develops what we call new ideas. Second, by establishing the kind of climate in which this process may take plans. Finally, by practicing the personal disciplines that make the process operate.

The process itself is deceptively simple. It is based on the associative processes of the mind--the way our minds combine separate ideas to create new ideas.

New ideas and solutions to problems are created by changing old ideas or experiences, by processing or manipulating them. We combine them in a new context of time or place, add other ideas, take something away, change their color, meaning, purpose. We may do this accidentally and unconsciously, or we may do it deliberately and consciously.

If we do it accidentally, the ideas are having us. When we do it deliberately, we are truly having ideas.

The question is, how do we go about this in a systematic and fruitful manner? Here are eight suggested steps:

1. Name the target. What's the problem? What kind of idea do you need?

2. Get the facts. Pile up all the information you can about the problem. This should include unsuccessful attempts to solve it. Often, ideas that have failed at one time will succeed at another time with slight changes.

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3. Try the obvious solutions first. Often merely naming a problem and collecting data about it will suggest solutions.

4. Next, try the wild ideas. In particular, look for apparently trivial, irrelevant aspects of the problem.

5. Think intensely about the problem. This is not really a separate step, but part of the steps we've mentioned before. Make yourself think about it until you have a solution or until you've reached what might be called a state of frustration.

6. Walk away from the problem. Put it out of your conscious mind. At this point, if you have covered steps 1 through 5, your subconscious will usually take over.

7. Seize the flash of insight. Generally, at some indefinite time after you walk away from the problem, you will find an answer welling up in your mind. Seize the idea at that moment and get it on paper.

8. Do something about the idea.

SOME PRECAUTIONS

In applying this method, there are a few precautions to observe:

Don't tackle too big a problem. A big problem can almost always be cut into smaller, bite-size problems. Before solving world peace, you'd better get friendly with your neighbor.

Just defining a problem or being aware that one exists is not sufficient reason for solving it. We spend too much time solving, and not enough time on the important problems.

You can solve only one problem at a time. To worry about a hatful of problems is just that: worry, but no solution.

It isn't always necessary to solve problems in one-two-three order. Island hop; pass over the parts of problems that you can't solve immediately and go on to some piece of the puzzle you can solve. Often this suggests the ideas you need for the part of the problem you temporarily bypassed.

Never stop with a single idea, a single solution to a problem. About the time the first idea comes along your mind is just warming up, as a rule, and it is likely that a number of other ideas are forthcoming--if you encourage them.

Reduce ideas to specific terms. The ideal is a mathematical formula. Failing this, be as concrete as possible. Write your ideas down.

Talk about your problem and your ideas. This is often the simplest way of triggering the idea you need. Other people's views will give you a fresh slant on your own problems and ideas.

Reduce as much of your idea search as possible to what you might call routine. Use check lists of questions adapted to the kinds of problems you most often face. The questions should start with the magic phrase "What if . . .?" "What if we make it bigger, longer, smaller, a different color; what if we do it backwards, upside down?"

Keep trying. Almost every problem is susceptible of solution.

Constantly seek to enlarge your storehouse of idea material. New ideas come out of what we have learned and experienced and still remember. A man who wants ideas deliberately exposes himself to the ideas of others through reading, conversation, and other sources of information. He is curious, observant, alert, anxious to see what's going on and to apply what he sees to his own needs.

All this is the "nuts and bolts" of producing ideas, and it may sound easier than it really is. For even a master of the mechanics of producing ideas needs certain essential conditions. These conditions make up the creative climate. When it is right, ideas breed like guppies. When it is wrong, ideas just don't appear.

THE CREATIVE CLIMATE

Part of this climate is made for the person; it is in his working environment. The person also imposes part of the climate on himself in the form of personal attitudes and disciplines.

There are three important keys to a favorable creative climate. They are the incentive to produce ideas, and the willingness to accept ideas.

Ideals are produced in worthwhile quantity and quality only when there is strong incentive. They appear because they are wanted. They are wanted because there are strong motives for producing them--motives that are part of the working environment, that satisfy basic human drives.

We must ask ourselves: Are we providing the right kind of incentive to produce ideas? Do we adequately reward ideas and the people who produce them--not just with money, but, for example, with praise?

As important as incentive in producing ideas is pressure--a certain degree of urgency. Within

reason, the pressure of deadlines, the demand upon ourselves for ideas within a certain time limit will help produce ideas and bring out our highest creative abilities.

If you need one idea and have a week in which to produce it, you may produce it within the week. If you need three ideas and have just an hour in which to produce them, your chances of having the three ideas may be even better than having one.

A thorough knowledge of the nuts and bolts of having ideas, an awareness of the pitfalls to avoid, and an understanding of the need for incentive and urgency--are these enough to produce workable ideas?

Almost--but not quite. Something is missing. Ideas will flourish only under certain conditions of mental attitude. Unfortunately, these conditions are all too rare.

THE "MIND JUDICIAL"

For the most part, the mind works in two broad areas. It breaks down facts, weighs them, compares, accepts, rejects, and puts the pieces together to reach a conclusion--a judgment or a verdict. This is the mind judicial.

On the other hand, the mind may go through much of the same analysis and synthesis--and in the end we have not a judgment, but an idea. This is the mind creative.

The difference is this: Judgment confines itself to the facts at hand and delivers a verdict on the validity and appropriateness of the situation. But creativity soars beyond judgments on what has been, and reaches out into the unknown.

Judgment says that two knives are two knives--no more, no less. Then it begins to tell us, if we wish to know, that the knives are dull or sharp, short or long, the right knives for a job or the wrong knives. Creativity takes a look at two knives and says: These are two knives, true; but they are also one pair of scissors.

Judgment looks at a natural phenomenon and says: This is fluorescence. If you send a current of electricity through certain kinds of materials they will glow with cool light. Creativity says: This is important. Let's light a room, explore a person's innards, send pictures through the air into your living room, locate those bombers.

Our usual reaction is on the side of judgment. Our usual reactions are to add two and two to make four. Almost from the beginning, we are conditioned to a judicial approach to the world about us.

A class in a large middlewestern university performs an interesting experiment to show how wrong judgment unsupported by imagination can be. The students take a score of proved and accepted ideas, and set themselves up as an imaginary committee considering these ideas for the first time. They try to find as many reasons as they can that these ideas are no good.

You would be amazed to learn that such important and accepted ideas as supermarkets, concrete highways, automobiles, monogamy, books and liberty have been proved--by judgment--to be absolutely impractical.

Consider the obstacles to a supermarket. What would you do if someone wanted half a pound of something, and you only had it in pound packages? For that matter, where would you get enough packaged products to make a supermarket practical? Anyway, people want their groceries delivered. And everyone knows you need clerks to sell goods. Besides, people want to be waited on when they go to a store.

But the fact remains that supermarkets are doing fine. Someone allowed his imagination to go beyond his judgment.

All this may sound like an indictment of judgment. It is nothing of the kind. Judgment evaluates ideas after we have them. But we cannot use judgment and imagination at the same time.

The secret is to operate these two parts of your mind independently. When you are after ideas, keep judgment out. Let your imagination run wild, if you will. Then, step in with judgment and decide what valuable ideas your imagination has produced.

Are you sure that the climate you as a manager are creating is one that encourages the individual to produce ideas freely?

It is not difficult to master a technique to increase idea productivity. And as we have seen, everyone has the ability to use this technique. But it is difficult to create an atmosphere that encourages and respects creativity in the individual without making concessions to bad judgment.

Yet it can be done.

It should be a challenge to every manager to find ways to develop an atmosphere in which individual creative effort is encouraged at every turn. Such a challenge requires a vital and powerful attitude that pervades every operation and every person in the organization. We have to start sometime--and it might as well be now.

--American Management Association
August 1966

